

In Memoriam **Elder L. Tom Perry** 1922-2015

A supplement to the Ensign



Elder Perry (second from left) with the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.



"Tom Perry served his country, his church, his family, his fellowman, and his God." —President Thomas S. Monson, in his funeral tribute to Elder L. Tom Perry (see pages 14–15)



Above: Elder Perry in his office at age 89. Right: Always quick with a smile, Elder Perry made friends easily wherever he went. Here he greets an attendee at the 2014 Humanitarian Awards dinner at which he and his wife, Barbara, were honored as humanitarians by Catholic Community Services of Utah.



Elder L. Tom Perry A BUILDER OF THE KINGDOM

"I know that the only lasting joy and happiness we will ever find during our mortal experience will come by following the Savior, obeying His law, and keeping His commandments. He lives. This is my witness to you."¹

Elder L. Tom Perry, who had served as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles since 1974, passed away on Saturday, May 30, 2015. He was preceded in death by his first wife, Virginia Lee, who passed away in 1974, and their daughter, who passed away in 1983. Tom and Virginia are the parents of three children. He is survived by two children and his second wife, Barbara Taylor Dayton, whom Elder Perry married in 1976.

he city was utterly destroyed. L. Tom Perry was among the first wave of marines to go ashore in Japan after the signing of the peace treaty at the end of World War II. When they reached the ruins of Nagasaki, he later recalled, it "was one of the saddest experiences of my life."

As Tom saw the utter destruction before him, he decided that he wanted to do all he could to help. The occupation troops set up headquarters and went to work cleaning up, rebuilding, and helping to bury the dead. Even so, Tom and several other soldiers wanted to do more.

They asked their division chaplain for permission to help rebuild the Christian churches in the area. Most of the churches had been all but shut down during the war due to government restrictions. The few buildings that existed were in desperate need of repair. Tom and the other soldiers explained that they would do the repair work in their free time.

Permission was granted, and Tom and the others set to work.

"We had no command of the language," he remembered. "All we could accomplish was the physical labor of repairing the buildings. We found the ministers who had been unable to serve during the war years and encouraged them to return to their pulpits. We had a tremendous experience with these people as they again experienced the freedom to practice their Christian beliefs."

When it was time to board the train out of Nagasaki, Tom and those who had worked on rebuilding churches were teased by many of the other soldiers. These other soldiers had their girlfriends with them and were laughing at Tom's group and mocking them



Left: Tom Perry served in the United States Marine Corps during World War II. He was among the first occupation troops to enter Japan. Above: At Brigham Young University with U.S. senator Joseph Lieberman. for having wasted their time with plaster, hammer, and nail.

Then something happened that Tom would remember for the rest of his life. Right at the height of the teasing, a group of approximately 200 Japanese Christians topped a little rise not far from the train station. They were walking toward the train station while singing "Onward, Christian Soldiers." This band of Christians presented gifts to Tom and the other soldiers who had worked so hard to serve them.

The Japanese Christians lined up along the railroad track. "As the train started down the tracks, we reached out and just touched their fingers as we left," he said. "We couldn't speak; our emotions were too strong. But we were grateful that we could help in some small way in reestablishing Christianity in a nation after the war."²

Elder L. Tom Perry was a builder all his life. Sometimes that meant building a chapel out of the rubble, and other times it meant building up a soul or a nation in need of his boundless optimism, enthusiasm, and spiritual power.

Wherever he went, Elder Perry left things stronger than they were before he came.

Born of Goodly Parents

Lowell Tom Perry was born on August 5, 1922, in Logan, Utah, USA, to Leslie Thomas and Nora Sonne Perry. He was one of six children in the family. Tom's parents loved and taught the gospel in their home every chance they could. This righteous upbringing was a source of strength to Elder Perry his whole life.

In his first general conference address as an Apostle, Elder Perry said of his childhood:



"We were dressed in our home each morning, not only with hats and raincoats and boots to protect us from physical storm, but even more carefully our parents dressed us each day in the armor of God. As we would kneel in family prayer and listen to our father, a bearer of the priesthood, pour out his soul to the Lord for the protection of his family against the fiery darts of the wicked, one more layer was added to our shield of faith. While our shield was being made strong, theirs was always available, for they were available and we knew it."³

From a young age, Tom was taught how to work hard. He joined in family chores, including the planting and caring of a large garden. "How grateful I am for a father who had the patience to teach me the art of gardening," he said. "Our family was taught not only the art of stacking and rotating cans and bottles on shelves, but also how to grow and replace the fruits and vegetables necessary to fill the empty cans and bottles again."⁴

His mother was a great teacher in the home, teaching her children gospel and academic truths at every opportunity, including while they were doing chores. "She was a natural teacher and far more demanding of us than our teachers at school and church."⁵



Top: Young Tom Perry (back row, left) with his parents, brothers, and sisters. Elder Perry said he always remembered the spiritual training his parents gave him as a boy. Above: A yearbook photo taken at Utah State Agricultural College after the war.

She would stand outside the bedroom door at night long enough to make sure her children said their prayers.

Of his mother, Elder Perry said, "She recognized that parents are entrusted with the education of their children and, ultimately, parents must ensure that their children are being taught what their Heavenly Father would have them learn."⁶

A Leader in the Kingdom

Elder Perry served in many leadership callings throughout his life. He served in two bishoprics, on a stake high

council, as second counselor in the American River Stake presidency in California, as a stake mission president, as a special assistant to the Eastern States Mission president (where he spent many hours helping with the Church's pavilion at the 1964–65 New York World's Fair), as a second counselor in the Boston Massachusetts Stake presidency, and as president of that stake. In 1972 he was called as an Assistant to the Twelve, and then in 1974 he was called as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

Elder Perry preached and lived with deep spiritual power and enthusiasm. His booming voice would echo in the hearts of listeners long after he stepped down from the pulpit.

Elder Quentin L. Cook of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles shared the following: "Elder L. Tom Perry bore a powerful witness of Jesus Christ. He knew the Savior, he loved the Savior, and [he was] powerful in bearing his witness of the divinity of the Savior."⁷



Above: People line up to meet Elder Perry at a visitors' center. Left: With his children on New Year's Day, 1960.

A Family Man

Tom met his wife Virginia Lee as he was counting roll for a stake leadership meeting. He said later that he did all right in taking the young men's attendance, but when it was time to tally the young women, his math skills hit a roadblock. "Suddenly my eyes met a charming, beautiful young woman. I completely lost my ability to count."

Tom was attending Utah State Agricultural College (now Utah State University) at the time



and had an extremely busy schedule. Even so, his courtship with Virginia Lee took center stage.⁸

Eight months after their meeting, L. Tom Perry and Virginia Lee were married in the Logan Utah Temple. They had three children together.

Family time was of the highest importance to Tom. He always took time for birthdays, family vacations, family traditions, and other important occasions.

In this regard, one experience left a lasting impression on him. When Tom and his family moved to the East Coast of the United States for work, they began searching for homes close to his place of employment. As house hunting continued, they started looking farther away. At long last they found a house that the whole family fell in love with. It was a beautiful one-story home nestled in the deep woods of Connecticut. The final test was to try out the



commute. Tom returned home discouraged. The commute was an hour and a half each way.

He posed the problem to his family, saying they could have either the house or a father. Their response surprised him. "We will take the house," they said. "You are never around much anyway."

This was a turning point for Tom. "I needed to repent fast," he said. "My children needed a father who was home more." He took the lesson to heart. "I changed my work habits to allow me to have more time with my family."⁹

As with so many other goals in his life, Tom accomplished the goal of family togetherness with great success. "My father was a lot of fun growing up," said Lee Perry, Elder Perry's son. "He kept us active and wanted to be involved with us. We always knew that we were loved by my father."¹⁰

Tom and Virginia Perry raised their children in righteousness and love. On December 14, 1974, only eight months after being called as an Apostle, Elder Perry lost his wife to what



Top and left: Photos taken on April 6, 1974, the day Elder Perry was sustained as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Above: A photo from 1979.



A year and a half after his wife Virginia passed away, Elder Perry married Barbara Taylor Dayton in the Salt Lake Temple.

had been a five-year battle with cancer. "Now she is whole again, and I am certain paradise is a much more joyful place because she is there," he said in tribute to his wife.¹¹

On April 28, 1976, Elder Perry married Barbara Taylor Dayton in the Salt Lake Temple. Elder and Sister Perry traveled the world together, preaching and teaching side by side.

Throughout his ministry, Elder Perry spoke often of his upbringing, his own family, and the need for families to stay strong and remain close. He felt so strongly about this that several times he spoke directly to his own family members as part of his general conference addresses.¹²

A Successful Businessman

All his long life, L. Tom Perry had a talent for applying skills and insights he learned from one area of his life to others. Several years into his first marriage, the calling came for him to serve as second counselor in the bishopric. This came at a time in his professional life when Tom could hardly imagine how to fit such a commitment into his schedule. He hardly had time for enough sleep.¹³

Still, he didn't hesitate to accept. One of the first skills he learned in the new bishopric was how to delegate and organize. He applied these principles to business and soon had more time at work and at home. These skills ultimately helped propel Tom to the upper management levels of his career in the retail business.

Another time Church training came into play was right after he'd accepted a job with a major firm in New York. Part of his new responsibilities included making budget presentations to a hard-

to-please board of directors.

Intimidated at first by the assignment, Tom visited the room where he would be making the presentation. In the room he discovered a large section of wall covered with flannel, most likely placed there for acoustic purposes. "As I looked at the large piece of flannel, I thought of my Primary teacher and the use of the flannel board [for lessons]."

Tom ordered some flannel-backed paper, created several components of his presentation on it, and captivated the board of directors at the budget meeting. "The presentation seemed to be very effective, and when it was over, I was complimented, thanks to my Primary teacher," he said.¹⁴

Though he excelled at business, Tom never let his profession sway his integrity or values. During one phase of his career, he was invited by his boss to attend various business dinners and the social hour that preceded them. Not wanting to be seen holding anything that even resembled an alcoholic beverage at these social hours, Tom soon began carrying around a glass of milk.

"I was amazed, as time passed, by how many of my associates were joining me for a glass of milk during the hour that we spent together," he said. "I found . . . that being different in the world brought some interesting reactions, but obedience to the Lord's law is always associated with His blessings."¹⁵

A Patriot

L. Tom Perry was serving as a full-time missionary in the Northern States Mission when World War II was raging. Within a month of returning home from his mission, he enlisted to join the marines.

He served his country with honor and returned home an even deeper patriot than before. In November 2013, Elder and Sister Perry were honored guests at the 238th Marine Corps Birthday Ball. "I would like to say I have always been proud of the time I served in the



Above: Elder Perry and his wife apply mortar to the cornerstone of the Brigham City Utah Temple. Above right: Elder L. Tom Perry (standing on the right) as a missionary with his companion, Elder Wayne Parkin, in the Northern States Mission, USA. Right: Young Tom Perry as a newly enlisted marine.



Portrait of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in 1979. Elder Perry is standing in the back row next to Elder Thomas S. Monson. Marine Corps," he said at the festivities.¹⁶

Early in his call as an Apostle, Elder Perry was invited to Washington, D.C., for a meeting of religious leaders to discuss ways in which to involve congregations in the participation of America's bicentennial celebration. At first Elder Perry was delighted. He wanted to help unite the churches' voices in gratitude for God's guiding and protecting hand in the founding of America.

To his shock, the group was unwilling to make any such statement. Any reference to the Lord our God was to be prohibited, as they did not want to offend the atheist. Elder Perry was deeply saddened at the outcome. However, he bore solemn witness in general conference of the truths that the collective body of religious leaders in Washington had not wanted to say. "I will teach my firm conviction that the foundation of any righteous government is the law that has been received from the Lord to guide and direct man's efforts. Righteous government receives direction from the Lord."¹⁷

Elder Perry remained a patriot his whole life.

A Friend to All

Elder Perry made friends wherever he went. A story from his life illustrates his ability to form friendships in virtually any setting. After he and his family moved to New York City for work, he noticed how people kept to themselves on the streets and in the subways.

"I thought, what an unfriendly group this was," he later remembered. Their behavior was in stark contrast to the inviting and social people from the California city his family had just left. He was so discouraged by the lack of warm and kind people around him that he was tempted to move his family back to California. His wife asked him if he'd tried yet to make a difference. He hadn't. She asked, "Why don't you try and see what happens?"

Tom devised a plan in his morning commute to get acquainted with somebody. He watched a man at his subway stop who went through the same routine each morning. The man arrived at the same time, bought a newspaper, stood at the same spot on the train platform, and sat in the same seat on the subway each day without variation.

Tom wanted to shake things up and see if he could form a friendship. He showed up early one day and stood on this man's favorite platform location. Then he sat in the man's preferred subway seat. After two days of doing this, Tom showed up to find the man had arrived earlier than usual and had claimed his spot on the platform. The man gave a little sneer at Tom, who then walked over and started laughing as he explained what he'd been doing.

"He thought that was the greatest thing he'd ever heard of," Elder Perry said. He and the man got on the train and rode together. They soon became great friends. Each morning it was a race to see who could reach the platform first. Soon the race expanded to 3, then 4, then 10 commuters hustling goodnaturedly to claim the prized spot.

"It livened up the whole platform," Elder Perry said. Throughout the process, all involved became a close-knit group. One Christmas about 10 of them stood on the platform singing Christmas carols together. "I developed some of the greatest friends I've ever had."¹⁸





Above: Elder Perry greeting members at the October 2013 general conference. Left: Elder Perry met with leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in April 2014 to discuss religious freedom. Below: Elder Perry always took time to visit, such as with this crowd at a Days of '47 parade in Salt Lake City, Utah.



Ever a Builder

During the October 1986 general conference, Elder Perry shared a story from his childhood that revealed an important insight into his life. His father was remodeling their home, and it was seven-year-old Tom's responsibility to pry nails out of the old lumber with a crowbar and then straighten them. Though it was hard work, he felt satisfaction in the completion of this daily task.

Elder Perry completed many such construction projects over the years, from chapel remodels to the construction of new church buildings. The lessons he learned as a child straightening nails seemed to be evident in the way he lived his life ever after—on or off the construction yard.

He said, "There is a real satisfaction that comes from finishing a task, especially when it is the best work we know how to do."¹⁹

Elder Perry never did anything less. He built, he taught, he served, he testified—all to the best of his ability. He was a true builder of the kingdom.

"The gospel of Jesus Christ is true," he said. "It has been restored to bless our lives in these latter days. It contains all the truths, principles, and ordinances contained in our Father in Heaven's great plan of happiness, which is a plan for us to return and live with Him in the eternal realms beyond. That the gospel of Jesus Christ is His divine way for us to face our glorious future is my testimony to you."²⁰ ■



Elder Perry enjoyed and worked hard to strengthen a close unity with the First Presidency and with other members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.









NOTES

- 1. L. Tom Perry, in "Special Witnesses of Christ," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Apr. 2001, 11.
- 2. L. Tom Perry, in "Special Witnesses of Christ," *Ensign*, Apr. 2001, 10–11; *Liahona*, Apr. 2001, 11.
- 3. L. Tom Perry, "Build Your Shield of Faith," *Ensign*, May 1974, 98.
- 4. L. Tom Perry, "The Need to Teach Personal and Family Preparedness," *Ensign*, May 1981, 88.
- 5. L. Tom Perry, "Mothers Teaching Children in the Home," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2010, 30.
- 6. L. Tom Perry, "Mothers Teaching Children in the Home," 29–30.
- 7. Interview with Elder Quentin L. Cook, May 5, 2015.
- 8. See Lee Tom Perry, L. Tom Perry, An Uncommon Life: Years of Preparation, 1922–1976 (2013), 146.
- 9. L. Tom Perry, "Called of God," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2002, 9.
- 10. Interview with Lee Tom Perry, May 5, 2015.
- 11. L. Tom Perry, "A Tribute," Ensign, May 1975, 33.
- 12. See, for example, his April 1982 and October 1985 general conference addresses.
- 13. See Lee Tom Perry, L. Tom Perry, An Uncommon Life, 194.
- 14. L. Tom Perry, "Teach Them the Word of God with All Diligence," *Ensign*, May 1999, 8; *Liahona*, July 1999, 8–9.
- L. Tom Perry, "In the World," *Ensign*, May 1988, 14.
 In Gerry Avant, "Elder Perry Honored for Service in U.S. Marine Corps," LDS.org.
- Manne Corps, Epsing.
 L. Tom Perry, "For the Time Will Come When They Will Not Endure Sound Doctrine," *Ensign*, Nov. 1975, 86.
- L. Tom Perry, in "Elder and Sister Perry," *Conversations* (episode 4), mormonchannel.org.
- 19. See L. Tom Perry, "The Joy of Honest Labor," *Ensign*, Nov. 1986, 62, 64.
- 20. L. Tom Perry, "The Past Way of Facing the Future," Ensign or Liahona, Nov. 2009, 76.



Tributes from Elder L. Tom Perry's Funeral

June 5, 2015, Salt Lake Tabernacle

"[My sister] Linda Gay and I . . . want to express our personal gratitude to Sister Barbara Perry for being the faithful companion to our father for over 39 years and especially for the care she has given him over the past year. . . . We acknowledge your great loss, Barbara—a loss magnified because your devotion to your husband was so complete. . . .

"Every day of [Elder Perry's] life was glorious to him. He embraced a life that was always full speed ahead. He immersed himself so completely in everything he did that he forgot until very late in life that it was necessary to slow down. . . . He lived his life to its fullest—a life of devotion to God, family, and country." Lee T. Perry, son

"Elder Perry by his nature is one who always expected to see things move forward. He seemed to have very little patience if time was not productive. He always taught, encouraged, and inspired all of the General Authorities that we could do more, we could do better, and we could move faster in blessing the lives of every member of the Church. . . .

"Elder Perry faced personal challenges, but through his unshakable optimism and his faith in God's eternal plan he would often declare, 'I have never had a bad day in my life.'...

"Three days prior to his passing, Elder Dallin H. Oaks and I called on Elder and Sister Perry. . . . As always, Elder Perry spoke of his love for members of the Church and his great anxiety and concern for their spiritual wellbeing. He said, 'Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of the world. Everything depends on Him. We better find a way to stay close to Him, and if you can't, there's not much hope. That is what we need. We can build in the stakes of Zion a real strong love for the gospel.'"

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

"L. Tom Perry was a big brother to all his juniors in the Quorum of the Twelve. . . .

"Elder Perry made a tremendous impression on everyone he met. As one Catholic friend said, 'His goodness was just transparent. He impressed you simply by being the greatsouled man that he was.'

"Another nationally prominent non-LDS leader wrote, 'Elder Perry was an inspiration to me. Four years ago he visited my offices in New York. I was struck by the incredible vitality of this man. He was friendly, clear, and direct—very direct. I was inspired. I am sure that Elder Perry had this effect on thousands of people over the course of his life.'" Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

"[Elder Perry] was one who responded willingly to any assignment and in whom we all had complete confidence. Blessed with an abiding faith, an optimistic attitude, and a charitable spirit, Tom exemplified the declaration of the Apostle Paul, 'Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity' (1 Timothy 4:12)....

"Tom Perry combined an insightful mind with a faith-filled heart to work wonders with his words. His style was distinctly his own. He was endowed with a rich and resonant voice with which he proclaimed the word of God at home and abroad all the days of his life. All who heard his voice, and those who read his words, could readily see that here was a fearless defender and testifier of truth....

"Along with his faith, commitment, and energy, Tom Perry was one of the most kind, considerate, and gracious men I've ever known. . . .

"I declare to you, my brothers and sisters, that there was no chink in L. Tom Perry's armor, there was no guile in his soul, there was no flaw in his character. He loved the Lord with all





his heart and soul and served Him with all his might to the very end of his mortal life. . . .

"Born in Logan, Utah, Tom answered his country's call when he served as a marine during World War II. He had a most distinguished business career, and served ably in every position in the Church to which he was called. . . .

"His service to the Lord's work has been exemplary and without flaw....

"His indomitable spirit has gone home to that God who gave him life. His record is known in heaven and there will yield its treasure trove of good deeds and faithful service....

"Wherever I go in this beautiful world, a part of this cherished friend will always go with me."

President Thomas S. Monson



Above: The Perry family follows the casket into the Tabernacle, greeted by members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and the Seventy. Elder Perry's wife, Barbara, shakes Elder Russell M. Nelson's hand. Bottom, far left: Elder Perry's daughter Linda Nelson places a single rose on the casket as her brother looks on. Left: In recognition of Elder Perry's service in the U.S. Marines, an American flag is given to Sister Perry.



SELECTED TEACHINGS

Marriage and Family: "We . . . believe that strong traditional families are not only the basic units of a stable society, a stable economy, and a stable culture of values—but that they are also the basic units of eternity and of the kingdom and government of God" ("Why Marriage and Family Matter—Everywhere in the World," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2015, 41).

Teaching in the Home: "Teaching in the home is becoming increasingly important in today's world, where the influence of the adversary is so widespread and he is attacking, attempting to erode and destroy the very foundation of our society, even the family. Parents must resolve that teaching in the home is a most sacred and important responsibility" ("Mothers Teaching Children in the Home," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2010, 30).

Patriotism: "As Church members, we live under the banner of many different flags. How important it is that we understand our place and our position in the lands in which we live! We should be familiar with the history, heritage, and laws of the lands that govern us. In those countries that allow us the right to participate in the affairs of government, we should use our free agency and be actively engaged in supporting and defending the principles of truth, right, and freedom" ("A Meaningful Celebration," *Ensign*, Nov. 1987, 72).

Obedience: "In a world where the moral compass of society is faltering, the restored gospel of Jesus Christ never wavers, nor should its stakes and wards, its families, or its individual members. We must not pick and choose which commandments we think are important to keep but acknowledge all of God's commandments. We must stand firm and steadfast, having perfect confidence in the Lord's consistency and perfect trust in His promises" ("Obedience to Law Is Liberty," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2013, 88).

The Restoration: "Our message is unique. We declare to the world that the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ has been restored to the earth. We declare with boldness that the keys of the priesthood have been restored to man, with the power to seal on earth and in the heavens. The saving ordinances pronounced by the Lord as requirements for entering into eternal life with Him can now be performed with binding authority by those who worthily exercise the power of His holy priesthood. We declare to the world that this is the day referred to by biblical prophets as the latter days. It is the final time, before the coming of Jesus Christ to rule and reign over the earth" ("The Message of the Restoration," Ensign or Liahona, May 2007, 88).

Simplicity: "In our search to obtain relief from the stresses of life, may we earnestly seek ways to simplify our lives. May we comply with the inspired counsel and direction the Lord has given us in the great plan of happiness. May we be worthy to have the companionship of the Holy Ghost and follow the guidance of the Spirit as we navigate this mortal journey" ("Let Him Do It with Simplicity," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2008, 10).

Testimony of Jesus Christ: "[Jesus Christ] is the centerpiece of the eternal plan of the Father, the Savior who was provided as a ransom for mankind" ("The Plan of Salvation," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2006, 71).



Elder Perry (right) enjoys a moment with three of his Brethren in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles—Elder D. Todd Christofferson, Elder Quentin L. Cook, and Elder Neil L. Andersen—at general conference.





THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS